

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-12

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 ISO-00 SAJ-01 COA-02 AID-20 SCI-06

COME-00 AGR-20 EA-11 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03

INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03

SS-20 USIA-15 DRC-01 /173 W
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R 161251Z MAR 74

FM USINT DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 197

INFO AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 0238

BEIRUT PASS BAGHDAD

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, EAGR, EAID, SY

SUBJECT: WHO WILL IRRIGATE SYRIA?

1. SUMMARY: ON MARCH 14 DURING MY COURTESY CALL ON JAPANESE AMBASSADOR MINORU IMAI, THE AMBASSADOR GAVE ME AN INTERESTING ACCOUNT OF A RECENT GO-ROUND HE HAD HAD WITH SARG OVER THE MASKINA IRRIGATION PROJECT. IT WILL BE USEFUL TO THOSE WHO ARE FOLLOWING INTER-ARAB RELATIONS AS WELL AS CURRENT ARAB ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE SOVIET UNION. END SUMMARY.

2. ACCORDING TO IMAI THE SARG ASKED GOJ OVER EIGHT MONTHS AGO TO CONSIDER UNDERTAKING A \$30 MILLION IRRIGATION PROJECT AT MASKINA EAST OF ALEPPO ON THE EUPHRATES RIVER. AFTER COMPLETING ALL THE NECESSARY STUDIES, THE GOJ TOLD THE SARG IT WOULD DO THE PROJECT ONLY TO
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DISCOVER THAT THE SYRIANS HAD BECOME IMPATIENT AND HAD GIVEN

THE PROJECT TO THE SOVIETS. THE SARG THEN TRIED TO GET THE JAPANESE TO DO SOMETHING ELSE, BUT THEY STEADFASTLY REFUSED. FACED WITH THIS IMPASSE, FONMIN KHADDAM, HIMSELF, ASKED IMAI TO HOLD OFF WHILE HE HELD FURTHER DISCUSSIONS. LATER THE SAME DAY KHADDAM CALLED HIM TO SAY THAT SYRIA DEFINITELY WANTED THE JAPANESE TO HAVE THE PROJECT. AND IT WAS SO.

3. THE NEXT CHAPTER BEGAN WHEN THE IRAQIS PROTESTED OVER THE PROPOSED WATER DIVERSION SAYING THERE COULD BE NO IRRIGATION PROJECTS UNTIL THE DISPUTE OVER APPORTIONMENT OF WATERS IN THE EURPHRATES HAD BEEN RESOLVED. IMAI SAYS THAT THE SARG WAS CONVINCED THE SOVIETS PUT THE IRAQIS UP TO THE PROTEST BECAUSE THEY HAD LOST THE PROJECT. IMAI ALSO SAYS THAT PRIME MINSITER MAHMUD AYYUBI OPENLY EXPRESSED "HATRED" OF THE SOVIETS FOR THEIR MEDDLING IN SUCH AFFAIRS. IN ANY EVENT, THE SYRIANS AUTHORIZED THE JAPANESE TO CARRY OUT AND COMPLETE THE PROJECT, DESPITE IRAQI OBJECTIONS.

4. COMMENT: IT SEEMS TO ME THERE ARE SEVERAL INTERESTING ASPECTS OF THIS STORY. THE FIRST IS THE SOVIET WILLINGNESS TO UNDERTAKE SUCH PROJECTS AS THEY ARISE. SECONDLY, THERE SEEMS TO BE A SYRIAN PREFERENCE TO GET OTHER COUNTRIES INVOLVED IN DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS EVEN TO THE EXTENT OF TAKING PROJECTS AWAY FROM THE SOVIETS. THIRDLY, IS THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SARG REPORTEDLY BELIEVES THE SOVIETS WILL GO TO APPLY PRESSURE ON DAMASCUS. YET, ABOVE ALL, THIS STORY SEEMS TO SAY THE SYRIANS HAVE THEIR OWN HEAD ABOUT THEIR BUSINESS AND ARE WILLING TO PROCEED AS THEY WISH EVEN IF IT MEANS RISKING PRESSURE FROM EITHER THE SOVIET UNION OR ITS ARAB NEIGHBORS.

SCOTES

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: IRRIGATION, AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT, FOREIGN RELATIONS, CONTRACTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 16 MAR 1974
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974DAMASC00238
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: n/a
From: DAMASCUS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t19740338/aaaabitr.tel
Line Count: 94
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 06 JUN 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <06 JUN 2002 by rowelle0>; APPROVED <31 JAN 2003 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: WHO WILL IRRIGATE SYRIA?
TAGS: PFOR, EAGR, EAID, SY, UR, JA
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005